

The Contemporary Australian Book:  
A Product of Its Time

by  
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Submitted in fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

University of Tasmania  
July 1996

*graduated 1996*

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*14/10/96*  
Date

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### Abstract

The research explores the nature of the book and book culture in contemporary Australia. It examines the ways in which the contemporary Australian book, that is the printed and bound, commercially produced book, is a product of its time, reflecting not only the conditions of its creation, manufacture, transmission, and use, but also the social, political, intellectual, economic, and cultural contexts in which these conditions occur.

A model derived from *histoire du livre* scholarship is presented and applied to both the general conditions of Australian book culture in the early 1990s, and to a single contemporary book, *The Orchard* written by Drusilla Modjeska and published by Pan Macmillan Australia. The model represents the 'life-cycle' of the generic book and encompasses the inter-connected events of authorship, publication, printing, distribution, sales, reception, use, and preservation, as well as the contexts in which these events occur. A brief historical overview of the development in Australia of each event is presented, along with an examination of the actual nature and conditions of, and contextual influences on, each event as it applied to *The Orchard* in the years 1994 and 1995.

The centrality of commercial influences is identified as the major factor in determining the nature of the book in contemporary Australia. The book is essentially a commercial product, produced and distributed in a commercial environment for profit. That the book is also a significant cultural artefact is a source of tension within Australian book culture, particularly among authors, publishers, and booksellers.

Other significant influences on the nature of the contemporary Australian book are identified and discussed. These include cultural, intellectual, and historical influences, the effects of government intervention, and the influence of women's participation in book culture.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance and, in some cases, for their support and encouragement: David Waters, John Levett, Anne Collins, Miranda Morris, Ann Hughes, Pat Tandy, David McLean, Dr. Ros Gibson, Meredith Quinn, Merry Joyce, Sister Frances, Penny Wells, and Angela Rockel.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Department of Employment, Education, and Training and the University's Office of Research for the Australian Postgraduate Award. I would also like to acknowledge and to thank Patsy Jones and the committee of the Sir John Morris Fund of the State Library of Tasmania for the financial assistance which allowed me to travel to Sydney, Canberra, and Melbourne to conduct interviews, carry out research, and to attend the Second National Book Summit.

I am grateful also to the people who spoke or corresponded with me about *The Orchard*; these people include Ray Bartle, Mary Callahan, Nikki Christer, David Gaunt, Barbara Mobbs, Drusilla Modjeska, Ronnie Pammenter, Robyn Pearce, Cassandra Pybus, and Clive Tilsley.

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